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EDITORIAL NOTES

The old question "Can virtue be taught?" shows no signs of resting. Rather it is raised more and more insistently. *The California Prize Essays on Moral Training in the Public Schools* by Rugh, Stevenson, Starbuck, Cramer, and Myers, emphasize various aspects of the need of this training and of the methods for bringing it to bear. The Council of the Religious Education Association at its meeting in Cleveland, in connection with the National Education Association, devoted several sessions to the subject.

Certain things are clear by this time, or ought to be. No intelligent person will confuse moral education with instruction in morality. The agencies for moral education are found in the family, in the general order of the school and of society, in the standards of value which are shown in business and every other occupation, and finally in the literature and art which present in concrete form what men prize or condemn. No one can question that the school contributes its share of these agencies. A recent observer of American life who has been writing unusually thoughtful letters to the *London Times*, bears emphatic testimony to certain things which the schools accomplish. After seeing American family life this writer was at a loss to account for the good order and self-control which on the whole prevail in America. The mystery was solved for him when he visited the schools. There he found children fitting into a larger order, learning to submit to the demands of a larger institution and finding their places in a social organization which gave discipline and impressed authority. Undoubtedly our system does not always find a medium between too great laxity on the one hand and a too mechanical rigor where the size of the school seems to demand military discipline. But on the whole there is undoubtedly a valuable training constantly in progress; and the personal influence of the great majority of teachers—even though we should all be glad to see more men in the ranks—is a wholesome and in many cases an inspiring factor.

What we should like to know, however, is this: Is there any place for more direct study of morality? Granting that the intellectual is by no means the main stock of the moral life, has it any significance at all? As schoolmen we like to think that study and intellectual effort is of some use. Is the moral life an entire exception?

If we consider what the general features are in the moral life we readily distinguish some which are not to be supplied by any instruction. For example, we say that conduct is formation of good habits—of character. Now we know that habits of action are not formed by thought and discussion; they are formed by action. No classroom instruction, then, will ever form a child's character so far as

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this implies actual doing. Or, again, we say conduct implies responsibility. This, too, is an attitude of character, a habit, a way of acting. It is brought out only by acting in response to requirements set by society or by the person himself. Once more conduct depends in part upon keen sensibilities, and upon a certain emotional ardor. Standards of right or wrong become ideals only as they appeal to the emotions. We win victories or master difficulties, or serve our fellows only as we take an interest in the thing to be done. This emotional quality, this interest, is stirred by some fine example in life or in literature. It is potent because of the charm of the person or of the contagious inspiration of the hero or the saint. We are steadied by our respect for the moral integrity or unflinching purpose which we confront. In a word, the habitual and emotional aspects of morality must be learned by doing, or suggested by what appeals to the feelings, rather than imparted by direct instruction.

But morality is not all habit and emotion. Conscientious conduct implies not only doing the right thing when we know it, but finding out the right thing to do. Conduct that is mere habit is not real moral conduct; "good habits" need constant revision for growing persons and changing society. Habits formed solely under the direction of other persons are very likely to break down if there is no reason in them from the standpoint of the person himself.

What, then, can be done to give the child a more personal and individual moral life which will rest upon some intelligent basis? It is easy to see some ways in which this cannot be done. No one with a sense of humor would wish to attempt to present in any formal fashion the various virtues. No one with genuine insight into child nature would wish to pattern moral instruction after those texts in physiology which in their zeal to inculcate temperance have too often made the name and the thing odious. If there is to be instruction in morality it must conform to scientific methods and intellectual conditions. Sentiment presented by the great artists is inspiring and effective. If attempted by the less capable it is commonplace and becomes sentimentality. The classroom instruction, if there is to be any, must follow a scientific method and not attempt the work either of actual life or of literature. What, then, is the part of science or knowledge in moral life?

First of all a scientific or intellectual study demands an effort to discover some general principles, to find reasons, to bring together what is fragmentary and detached, to see whether our standards of conduct are merely a matter of habit and sentiment or whether they can be justified. Now this involves analysis, and it may be said that the high school boy or girl does not need to be stimulated toward criticism and challenge of existing habits. It may be said also that the adolescent is critical enough of established conventions and order. To examine morality intellectually may seem to be pushing the wrong way. It is pre-

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cisely because the adolescent is critical and disposed to challenge what he has been taught in earlier years that some study of the reasons for moral standards is indicated at this stage in his development. We must not flatter ourselves that our high-school boys and girls are content to take on trust everything that their elders believe, or to maintain unquestioned all the habits in which they have been trained. Our statistics of crime and our constant experience with boys and girls not criminals shows that this is the time, if ever, when they need to have some intellectual aid in their process of criticism and reconstruction. It is not a question whether boys and girls of the high school will be critical. The question rather is whether they can be aided to find positive values in what may too easily seem a mere matter of authority or tradition.

The second characteristic of scientific or intellectual treatment has already been suggested in the preceding paragraph. It is characteristic of science that it affords a method. It does not claim to decide offhand the problems presented; it rather gives a way in which its followers may go forward patiently and steadily. The very process of study with such a method inculcates sobriety and responsibility in judgment. We recognize the value of this method in other departments of modern life. Is it not to be expected that if this method were applied properly to the study of moral problems it would be a steadying force at just the period when the boy or girl needs a new method? The personal control which was so effective during earlier years is now liable to be less welcome. If a control by rational principle and method can be gradually brought to have a place, the difficult period of transition to manhood and womanhood may be for many—especially of the more independent sort—rendered much easier.

At a later time we shall present some suggestions as to what subject-matter may be studied as a basis for moral instruction.